

How to Be Comatose

by Owluna

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Summary: For seventeen days, my mind stayed blank, filled with nothing but darkness. No thoughts, no emotions, no images, just a complete and total blackout. On the outside, it was a very different story. - Set during the end of HTTYD. - Rated T for action violence and minor suggestive themes. - See my profile for the latest update information. - Disclaimer: I own nothing.

1. Preface

Preface

* * *

><p>Some say the world will end in fire. Some say in ice. I say it doesn't really matter which. The end result is the same, but the first time my world almost ended was by fire.

It may sound ridiculous, but time really did slow in those moments when I saw the massive tail of the Red Death looming above us and coming in too fast, too fast to have any chance of manoeuvring out of its path, at least not without a working tail fin for Toothless.

Then time sped right up again and everything after that happened so quickly. There was my shouting, Toothless' roar, and the sudden, unimaginably heavy impact and the crunch of my bones when the Red Death's giant bludgeon of a reptilian tail collided with us. And for a few moments, the dizziness and disorientation of being in free fall, separated from my dragon, and on the verge of passing out. I saw the flames blooming upwards towards me and heard Toothless' roar behind me just before the unbelievably intense, scorching and searing heat became more than I could take. It forced my eyes to close and my mind to go blank.

For seventeen days, it stayed blank, filled with nothing but

darkness. No thoughts, no emotions, no images, just a complete and total blackout.

On the outside, it was a very different story.

2. Chapter 1

Chapter 1

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><p>Toothless had a splitting pain in his head, but maybe that was a good thing because it distracted him from the pain that occupied every single other part of his body, especially his right side, which he'd landed none too gently on. Something was wrong with his hearing too. There was a high-pitched tone in his head that would not stop. He wasn't deaf though. He could still feel vibrations, low tones being easier to pick up because he could sense them with his whole body and not just his ears. The first thing Toothless listened for was Hiccup's heartbeat.</p>

Faint, but there. The dragon breathed, relieved that the boy was alive.

The next thing Toothless heard was Stoick the Vast, shouting for Hiccup. He stopped when he saw the Night Fury lying on charred ground, bits of ash sinking slowly from the sky like sombre snowflakes.

Stoick ran and fell to his knees at the dragon's side. Others weren't far off, including Astrid, though they stayed at a distance.

"Oh, sonâ€|" said the Viking. "I did this."

While Toothless knew that the Red Death was solely responsible for all the destruction caused that day, he knew that Stoick was unwise to lead his people into a war without even knowing what they were truly up against. If he hadn't acted so rashly, this situation could've been avoided.

Clearly, Stoick realized this.

But if the Vikings had not brought war to the Red Death's door, all the dragons of Dragon Island would still be enslaved, and the people of Berk would still be killing them. So perhaps everything happens for a reason.

Toothless breathed again, let out a croon of pain, and lifted his head. It took his eyes a moment to adjust and focus on Stoick. The dragon could see that his remorse was sincere, and he knew that Hiccup still needed more help â€“ help that Toothless couldn't provide â€“ so he decided he'd have to trust Hiccup's father.

"I'm so sorryâ€|" he said softly, his heart full of regret and pain.

That apology helped convince Toothless that he actually could trust Stoick.

The dragon opened his wings, one at a time, revealing the unconscious body of a fifteen-year-old boy.

"Hiccup!"

Toothless let Stoick take Hiccup from his protective grasp, and the chief immediately threw off his helmet and listened for any sign of life.

He got it.

"He's alive! You brought him back alive!"

Of course I did, thought Toothless to himself as the crowd behind Stoick rejoiced, Vikings and dragons alike. Toothless didn't miss Astrid's elated smile.

"Thank you, for saving my son," Stoick said to the Night Fury, who was too exhausted to do anything more than exhale and close his eyes again in response.

"Well, most of him," corrected Gobber.

It was the last thing Toothless heard before he succumbed to the pull of sleep.

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><p>AN:** My apologies for not getting this chapter out as soon as I had planned! I meant to update about eight or nine hours ago. Oops! Thank you, lovely readers, for your patience. The next chapter will be added soon and will be significantly longer.

Positive feedback and constructive criticism are welcomed. Flames will be used to heat the dragon stables.

3. Chapter 2

Chapter 2

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><p>Stoick had already seen that Hiccup didn't have all the body parts he once did, but he hadn't been fully aware of it until Gobber unceremoniously pointed it out. He realized that they weren't exactly out of the woods yet, not with Hiccup or Toothless.

The Viking bellowed, "Do we have any ships left that are seaworthy?"

A group of Vikings scuttled off to go check.

"The boy might not have time for that, Stoick," Gobber pointed out. Then he followed the group that had gone for the ships.

Stoick knew his friend was right.

"Astrid!" he called.

She quickly came forward.

"Yes sir?"

"Can these dragons pull our ships home?"

Physically, they could maybe lift one of the smaller ones and fly it home between the four tamed dragons, or tow two through the water. As far as coordinating the riders and dragons well enough to do it successfully, especially without Hiccup's helpâ€¦ that was another matter. But Hiccup was counting on her, and his life might very well depend on whether she could get him back to Berk in time. She would have to deliver.

"Yes, I think so," she finally replied. "But we'll need lots of rope."

The other Vikings came back with the report. One ship had been protected by the rocks and was fit to sail, while another two were severely damaged but not destroyed, and could be towed by a pair of dragons each.

"Plenty of rope on the undamaged ship," put in Gobber, having heard Astrid's comment.

"We load up all the injured on one of the damaged ships and tow it in front as fast as we can. The undamaged ship will follow next in case either of the other two don't make it, and the last ship will be towed behind it!" Stoick ordered, and the Hooligans set to work loading up.

Astrid and her dragon got the ropes from Gobber and Astrid tied the twins' Zippelback and Fishlegs' Gronkle to the trailing ship, then Snoutlout's Monstrous Nightmare to the lead.

On the deck of the leading ship, she fastened the final end of the rope to her Nadder, and then found Stoick watching over Hiccup, who was propped against a sleeping Toothless while Gobber tied a leather belt tightly around Hiccup's blackened ankle. Despite being a Viking, the sight of a charred stump and simply nothing where a foot was supposed to be made her feel queasy. Beside Gobber, the upper half of Hiccup's boot laid with its edges still smoking.

Swallowing tightly, Astrid turned away and asked Stoick, "Are we ready?"

"Just about. You and Snotlout can wait for my command."

Astrid nodded and watched Stoick run off to help the last of the injured aboard, then mounted her Nadder as he raised the gangplank. He completed his circle of the ship and then motioned for the ship to set sail.

"Ready, Snotlout?" Astrid called.

"I was born ready!" laughed the obnoxious teenager, but the laugh didn't reach his eyes. Ultimately, he was still scared for his cousin and friend â€" not that he would ever admit the second part.

Astrid and Snotlout took off from the deck and began to pull the ship towards the horizon, flying as fast as the ship's weight would allow them. Behind them, the other two ships soon became nothing but specks in the distance.

Hours passed. Dusk fell, then night. The dragons tired and so did their riders.

"Good job, girl. You're doing great," Astrid praised her dragon. "We're almost there."

She hoped so, at least. The island of Berk had yet to appear on the horizon, but it was also the dead of night, so the familiar silhouette of land would be difficult to see. Maybe it was there and she just hadn't spotted it yet.

"Come on you lazy lug, you can't give up yet," Snotlout told his dragon. The Nightmare roared angrily and let his rope go slack.

Astrid's Nadder squawked at having to bear the entire weight of the ship.

"Maybe you should try being more encouraging to it," Astrid suggested, although if Snotlout was anywhere near as exhausted as she was, she doubted he was capable of giving any encouragement. It was unlikely he would have any even if he were in a better mood.

"Hookfang doesn't need encouragement! He's a warrior! Although bribery is always a good idea!" Snotlout then offered the dragon a barrel of fish once they arrived in Berk, but the dragon's rope stayed slack.

"Okay two," Snotlout said.

Still nothing.

"Three?"

The dragon huffed.

"Four. That's all I've got."

Apparently four wasn't enough.

"UGH!" Snotlout shouted. "FINE! I will get you a fifth one but this is my final offer! Take it or leave it!"

Grudgingly, the dragon picked up the slack in the rope and went back to helping the Nadder.

"Hookfang?" Astrid repeated, not missing what Snotlout had called him earlier.

"Hiccup named his dragon. 'Toothless' is a stupid name because the thing has teeth, but still, why can't I name mine?" Snotlout asked. "Hookfang is a way better dragon name anyway. It's fearsome and terrifying!"

Astrid shook her head and grinned.

"No, it's a good idea to name them. I think I'll call mineâ€œ Stormfly," she decided. "Do you like that name, girl?"

The Nadder made a sound of approval, though she would've been far more pleased if she weren't about to drop out of the air and into the water.

"Hey, what's that?" Snotlout asked, pointing into the darkness.

Astrid peered into the night. Could it be?

"It's Berk!" She exclaimed as soon as she recognized the familiar shape of the sea stacks just off shore. "We're almost there!"

"Thank Odin!" Snotlout laughed.

Astrid's yell had been loud enough to reach those on deck who were awake, including Stoick. It was a huge relief, and the excitement of it spread throughout the ship, waking those who were sleeping and then spreading some more.

With renewed strength in their wings and their destination now in sight, Stormfly and Hookfang picked up speed. Hookfang saw to it that Snotlout made good on his promise of fish as soon as they were docked, and Astrid asked him to feed Stormfly for her too.

"Anything for you, darling," he said.

Instead of saying something like, "Go kiss a yak," Astrid ignored him and went to find Stoick. She had more important things to worry about, like Hiccup's life, for instance.

Had they gotten him home in time? Astrid didn't know yet.

She didn't find Stoick though. The chief was already taking Hiccup to see Gothi, according to Gobber. He told her she'd done well, and that she needed to go home and get some rest, despite her protests that she wouldn't be able to sleep anyway.

"There's nothin' you can do for him right now. He's in Gothi's hands."

"But what if—" Astrid couldn't finish.

"You can't think that way, Astrid. You never treat a man on the edge of death like he's dyin' so that maybe you can trick his body into thinkin' it's not, because sometimes that's enough to keep him alive. Besides, that boy's got a lot more fight in him than you would think, just by lookin' at him."

Gobber was right. She had to trust that Hiccup would pull through. She returned home, even though she still didn't think sleep would be possible.

I'll just rest for a minute, Astrid thought to herself when she sat on her bed. She was asleep before her head hit the pillow.

* * *

><p>AN:** This chapter is on time, and much longer! Hooray! Thank you for the wonderful reviews, too. They're great motivators.

As a side note, I've noticed that every update so far has ended with a character unconscious/falling asleep. This wasn't intentional but now I'm wondering how far I can take it, just for kicks. Kind of interesting, considering how this story is about everything that happens while Hiccup is in a coma. I think it makes for a neat common thread. We'll see what happens!

4. Chapter 3

Chapter 3

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><p>Meanwhile, Stoick was pacing restlessly around Gothi's tiny house. He nearly knocked over the trinkets on her shelves doing it, and Gothi promptly whacked him on the head with her sceptre, giving him a stern look afterwards.<p>

Stoick stayed still after that and just watched the old woman attempt to heal his son. She pressed a damp cloth to his sweaty forehead and used medicinal herbs to numb whatever feeling he had left in the remaining part of his leg. She cleaned and bandaged Hiccup's minor wounds, then set to work doing the same thing to what was left of his leg.

Finally, she turned to Stoick.

She pointed at her eyes. Watch. Then Gothi waved her sceptre at Hiccup's leg, which was obvious enough. Lastly, in the dirt she drew the rune that was placed on the doors of houses under quarantine during outbreaks of disease. Sickness.

Stoick nodded, understanding that she thought Hiccup's leg might become infected.

"Thank you, Gothi," Stoick said graciously to the old woman, who smiled gently. "Can I take him home?"

Having already warned Stoick about the risk involved, Gothi nodded, and Hiccup was carried back to his own home in his father's arms.

As soon as Stoick finished tucking his son into bed, he heard a distinct roar outside. It was Toothless, without a doubt.

Stoick opened the front door to find the Night Fury limping through the square below, following Hiccup's scent.

When he saw Stoick, he hobbled faster and then tried to nose his way inside.

As much as Stoick realized that Toothless cared for Hiccup, he couldn't just let the dragon in to see him.

"Hiccup is upstairs in his room and I'm sorry but you won't fit up there," Stoick explained.

Toothless peered around Stoick to see for himself and saw that the stairwell was indeed too narrow. Not one to easily accept defeat, however, Toothless scratched and climbed his way up onto the roof to tuck his head inside Hiccup's small window. The dragon let out a sad cry, but Hiccup did not stir. His rider seemed so close yet so far.

Stoick had to do something. He spoke to the injured Night Fury. "I'll try moving his bed downstairs tomorrow so you can come in and see him, but what everybody needs right now is some rest. You can come inside if you like, as long as you stay downstairs."

Stoick wasn't entirely sure that letting such a large beast inside the house was a good idea, but he felt like he owed Toothless for saving his son's life.

Toothless crooned at Hiccup again and then climbed back down to ground level. Stoick stepped back to let him inside, and he sniffed around at the entrance a bit before tentatively stepping over the threshold.

Stoick watched him look around. When his eyes finally settled on the dim coals in the fireplace and he tried to poke his way closer to it, Stoick cleared the furniture in front of it so there would be enough space for Toothless to lie down, which he did after spinning in a small circle.

Out of habit, Toothless almost released a plasma blast at the floor like he normally would before bed to make it nice and toasty. Luckily, he thought better of it at the last instant and redirected the shot into the fireplace, reviving the dying embers in it. The planks beneath him were flammable, unlike the rock he usually slept on.

Stoick threw a couple more logs on to feed the new flames and said, "Not bad, dragon."

If only he knew how close Toothless had been to scorching the rug.

Toothless heard Stoick's footsteps retreat to his own bed, and then he listened to the faint sound of Hiccup's slow but steady breathing until he was satisfied that the boy was safe for the time being.

Gingerly, Toothless licked the cuts and scrapes on his right side to clean them and help them heal. Most of them were minor, since his hide was quite sturdy, but there was a deep gash on his right shoulder that was sure to leave a scar. He'd probably keep limping for a couple days but the wound would heal quickly. He'd be good as new in no time.

If only the same could be said for Hiccup.

When Stoick stopped worrying about his son long enough to fall asleep and began snoring like a hibernating bear, the noise drowned out the sound of Hiccup inhaling and exhaling softly upstairs. Toothless took

it as a sign that he ought to get some rest too. He would be no help to Hiccup if a lack of rest made him exhausted and too slow to heal. Besides, if Hiccup was in danger or needed help, Toothless would feel it in his very core and be woken up. His dragon senses were very in tune with his rider, and he trusted them.

Toothless couldn't wait for the day when he could go flying with Hiccup again. That longing was the last thing on his mind before he fell asleep, and so he dreamt of soaring above a deep blue ocean and under an early morning sky full of clouds that blushed when the sun kissed them.

* * *

><p>AN:** Bit of a filler chapter, I know. This should be the last of the shorter ones... but what do I know? I have a general idea of where this story is going but I'm not working from an outline so I make no guarantees about chapter length, although everything from here on out will hopefully be at least 1000-1200 words and I promise the next update will be much more action-packed. I'm excited to write it.

Fun Fact: Even though it's a natural animal behaviour, Toothless licking his wounds is a small nod to the tv series episode where Hiccup tells Snotlout that Night Fury saliva has incredible healing properties. I decided that this fact was indeed true and Hiccup wasn't just pulling Snotlout's leg about it.

5. Chapter 4

Chapter 4

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><p>"Hey, what's that?"<p>

"Where?"

"Over there."

"It looks like a ship."

"Maybe it's Trader Johann!"

Spitelout pushed his way through the dense crowd of people on deck over to where all the commotion was going on. He leaned on the edge of the railing and squinted at the symbol on the main sail. There was just enough moonlight to make it visible, along with the crests of the waves made by the ship's wake.

"I don't think that's Trader Johann," he said.

Now the others could see it too, along with the shadow of a second vessel further off skimming quickly through the water.

"Those are Outcast ships!" someone shouted.

"They're gainin' on us!" another cried.

Spitelout, being in charge, commanded, "Draw your weapons! Have the dragons fly low so the bow blocks them from view and prepare to release them! Hide as many of yourselves below deck as you can until it's time to attack! We will surprise them with our numbers! Our enemies won't know what hit them!"

The Hooligans responded, except for Fishlegs, who yelled, "Don't untie us unless you have to or else this ship will be dead in the water! We still have a decent range with the ropes on."

"Or you could just let us go now, and we fly over there and blow them up before they even get to us," Tuffnut suggested.

"Yeah, we're good at blowing things up!" Ruffnut said enthusiastically.

"Like, KABOOM!" Tuffnut exclaimed, raising his arms in order to demonstrate.

Noxious fumes welled up in one of the green dragon's mouths, leaking out from between its fang-like teeth, while the tell tale clicking sound of electrical sparks came from the other. The Zippleback seemed to be agreeing with the twins, and was itching to cause an explosionâ€ or several.

"Oh, no," Spitelout disagreed, grinning cunningly. "We don't want to destroy those ships. We're going to commandeer them!"

The twins frowned, disappointed, as were each of the Hideous Zippleback heads.

Fishlegs felt slightly sick to his stomach. After surviving a tangle with the Red Death, he wasn't exactly in the mood for another battle.

Spitelout yelled over to Bucket and Mulch on the ship beside and slightly ahead of them and told them what the plan was. Bucket started running around yelling and whacking the bucket on his head to get the attention of the other Vikings on board.

"The Outcasts are coming!"

Clang.

"They have two ships!" And yet Bucket was holding up three fingers.

Clang. Clang.

"Get ready!"

_CLANG! Thump. _

Bucket had managed to knock himself out and now lay sprawled and unconscious on the deck.

Mulch just sighed at his long-time friend and turned to those who were looking at him to explain what Bucket had been going on about.

Meanwhile, Silent Sven was gesturing Spitelout's attention back to the approaching Outcasts. They were only a few ship lengths behind now, and were in position to flank the Hooligans from both sides.

They drew nearer still, their weapons raised and glinting under the moonlight, leaving no doubt about what kind of encounter this would be. Certainly not a friendly one.

Spiteout scanned the enemy figures, looking for one in particular, but it appeared that Alvin the Treacherous was not on either of these particular ships. Good. That meant that these Outcasts were just attacking in an attempt to be opportunistic, rather than full on offensive.

Savage, Alvin's right hand man, was present and he gave the attack order once the Outcasts were close enough. They dropped from the rigging like out of control pendulums and leapt onto the deck of the Hooligan ships, their axes and bludgeons swinging wildly.

Spiteout laughed when he used his own blade to block the sword strike that Savage had tried to inflict.

"Give it up, Spitelout, your ship is halfway sunk already! It looks like you tried to roast it for dinner."

Spiteout took a swing at Savage's side but he stepped back out of reach. Spitelout held up his shield to block the returning arc of Savage's sword and took a jab at Savage's knee, which hit its mark and damaged some sort of tendon, causing Savage to crumple.

"That's why we'll be takin' your ships!" Spitelout declared. He was starting to get drunk on the thrill of battle. The metallic sound of blades scraping together rang out all around them.

"You're out of your mind if you think you're goin' to get your hands on our ships!" Savage barked, although he was wincing and clutching his knee with bloodstained fingers.

Spiteout started to fight the adversaries that were rushing to Savage's aid.

"You have no idea what you're up against, Savage!" he shouted, and with that, the Hooligans in the hold below sprang out to ambush their rivals. The twins and Fishlegs flew back over the bow and Outcasts started falling left and right from the dizzying fumes of the Zippleback and the Gronckle's bulky, boulder-like tail that could take down several men at once.

"This is awesome!" Ruffnut yelled, while Tuffnut was having a hard time stopping his dragon head from igniting the fumes from the other. There may have been an accidental explosion or two as a result, but that only added to the awesomeness as far as the twins were concerned.

"Totally awesome!" Tuffnut agreed as a fireball lit up the scene, making orange light reflect off of his face.

"No, this is definitely not awesome!" Fishlegs disagreed, letting out a high-pitched scream when one of the Outcasts came flying down

from the crow's nest at him, a battle cry emanating from his lungs and a mace gripped tightly in his hands.

The Gronckle tried to get out of the way but the towrope was preventing that from happening.

Fishlegs saw that it was charred from the twins' earlier shenanigans involving explosive gas and urged the dragon to pull harder.

"Come on boy, you can do it! Get us out of he-EEEEAAAAAAAHHHAAH"

Several things happened at once. The rope snapped, sending Fishlegs and the Gronckle flying towards the other Hooligan ship, where a bunch of Outcasts broke their fall. Fishlegs' would-be assailant missed his mark and crashed right through the ship's charred woodwork in a burst of splintered planks and blackened timber. The Outcast landed somewhere in the hull and there were more thumping noises as oak debris rained down from the ruined rafters. His own horned helmet rolled into the hole and he got a good whack on the head from it.

The whole spectacle made the twins holler with laughter.

"Like I said!" Tuffnut started.

"AWESOME!" Ruffnut finished for him.

"Hey, thanks Fishlegs!" Mulch said, seeing that his Gronckle was sitting on a number of unconscious Outcasts.

"No problem," Fishlegs said, forcing an uneasy laugh. He felt dizzy and disoriented, but was otherwise fine.

The Hooligans had the upper hand by that point, and began tying up their enemies and subduing the few that were still fighting. Once everyone was restrained, Spitelout directed that they all be moved onto the scorched ship and announced that they would take the two Outcast ships for themselves.

"You're lucky I answer to Stoick. If I were chief, you'd all be thrown overboard," Spitelout said lowly in Savage's ear. He shuddered against the ship's mast.

"Sir, will the Outcasts be okay?" Fishlegs asked Spitelout as they started to pull away from the conquered men. "I mean, we're just leaving them there on a ship that can barely float, let alone move."

"That's what they get, for messin' with us, but of course they'll be fine. Everythin' eventually washes up on Outcast Island. That's why it's Outcast Island."

Fishlegs felt a little better. And he was glad that the Gronckle and Zippleback didn't have to pull an entire ship anymore. He didn't know how much more they could take. Probably not much, considering both beasts were already napping. They finally had some breathing room on deck too, and they could sail home faster. But while it had been a low-risk, high-reward battle, Fishlegs didn't want to relive the experience any time soon.

Unfortunately for him, a large Viking who was missing an ear burst out from under the barrel where he was hiding and came at Fishlegs with a club. He was down before he knew what hit him.

"Oops. Looks like we missed one!" Spitelout laughed. "Better go swim to your friends," he sneered at the stowaway.

Realizing how outnumbered he was, the man with one ear didn't need to be told twice. He landed in the water with a splash.

On the ground, Fishlegs stirred and muttered, "Speed: eightâ€| Armour: sixteenâ€| Plus eleven stealth times two..." before he passed out completely.

* * *

><p>AN:** Last week was a very busy one for me so this update took longer than usual, but I think this is my best chapter yet and it's my longest so far, so hopefully that makes up for it. Again, thank you so much for your reviews! I read and appreciate them all. If you guys want to leave me some new ones, I'd love to hear what your favourite part/line of this chapter (or any chapter) was.

6. Chapter 5

Chapter 5

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><p>Something was wrong. Very, very wrong.<p>

Toothless' eyes shot open and scanned his unfamiliar surroundings. His night vision was exceptionally detailed but monochrome, which made everything appear in dull shades of green, except for the coals in the fire that were dimly glowing red with heat.

He remembered where he was, but quickly forgot again because he had something much more important to worry about, or rather, someone.

Hiccup.

Toothless cried out with a roar to alert Stoick that Hiccup was in trouble.

The chief was woken from his uneasy sleep immediately and came running out into the den. His eyes were wide and his heart pounded with terror.

"Is Hiccup alright?"

Another dragon wail came from Toothless.

Stoick squeezed up the narrow staircase to Hiccup's room and fell to his knees at his son's bedside.

Hiccup's breathing was shallow and there was a sweaty sheen to his skin. His wet hair stuck to his forehead. Stoick pushed it

back.

"He's got a fever," Stoick said to himself, knowing that it wasn't a good thing. He needed to bring Hiccup's temperature down, and fast.

He went back downstairs to get some ice, where Toothless was bouncing around the living room restlessly and attempting to climb the stairs every so often.

"Calm down, I'm goin' to take care of him," Stoick said, although it didn't help much.

Toothless took the bronze ring that served as a handle for the front door between his teeth and pulled, making the door creak on its hinges. He ran outside and resumed his place on the roof where he could peek inside Hiccup's window, his head blocking the faint light of dawn that was beginning to filter through it.

When Stoick rested the ice on Hiccup's forehead, the crease between the boy's brows lessened, but it wasn't enough. The fever still burned. What Stoick needed was Gothi.

"Keep an eye on him for me, will you?" Stoick asked Toothless, who was looking at everything from his upside down vantage point.

The Night Fury fixed his emerald stare on the boy, pupils wide. He would keep both eyes on Hiccup.

"I'll be back soon!" Stoick promised.

* * *

><p>Astrid overslept. She never overslept. And yet she still felt the dull ache of exhaustion in her bones.</p>

When she saw how high the sun already was, she wanted to kick herself. She should've been up hours ago.

She laced up her boots and didn't even think about breakfast. She just ran to Hiccup's house as fast as her legs would take her.

When she saw Stoick out on the front steps with his head in his hands, her heart sunk. She feared that Hiccup was dead for the second time in less than a day.

"Sir? Is heâ€|?" Astrid didn't know what she was trying to ask.

"He's had a terrible fever since early this mornin'. Gothi's in there doin' her best, and Gobber's helpin' her. I was told to get some fresh air."

He needed a nap too, by the looks of the dark circles under his eyes. He couldn't have gotten more than a few hours of sleep.

Hiccup wasn't dead, at least. Astrid was relieved.

"Is he going to be okay?" Astrid wanted to know.

"We don't know yet." Stoick answered, glancing down.

Astrid looked around. "Is there anything I can do to help?"

Stoick nodded up towards the black creature perched on the shingles of his house. "He's even more stubborn about leavin' Hiccup for any amount o' time than I am. See if you can get him to take a break from guardin'."

Astrid thought she knew exactly how to do just that. She left and returned a short while later with a basket slung over her shoulder.

"Hey, Toothless! Look what I brought for you!"

She tipped the basket over and let the fish spill out.

Toothless nearly jumped down to eat them, but then he looked back at Hiccup and made a sad warbling noise.

"Hiccup would want you to eat," Astrid said gently. "I'll go in and watch him for you if you want me to."

Toothless liked that idea. Astrid and Stoick were the only two people he was sure he could trust to take care of Hiccup. He bobbed his scaly head up and down in a nod, and then hopped down and started to devour the breakfast Astrid had brought him.

Astrid paused by the door, where Stoick was still sitting. "May I?" she asked, pointing inside.

"Sure, lass." He stood with a slight groan and rubbed his temple. "I've really got to make a round to see how everyone else is doin', and the other two ships should've been back by now but they're not yet. Come find me if anythin' changes with Hiccup."

"Yes, sir," Astrid promised. She entered the house and cautiously made her way up the stairs.

"Hello?" she said, just as her head appeared above the floor.
"Gobber? Gothi?"

"Aye, Astrid," Gobber said. "Do you mind helpin' Gothi for a wee bit? She wants me to go get all these ingredients to make some more medicine for Hiccup."

He held out a list of things that was thankfully shorter than the one for the eel pox cure.

"Of course, Gobber."

Gothi stopped grinding with her mortar and pestle to wave her sceptre around agitatedly.

"She says she don't need help right now," Gobber translated, "But it's good you're here, just in case."

Gothi got more aggravated at Gobber.

"Yes, I know! I'm goin'! I'm hurryin', see?" His peg leg made a more

wooden sound than his boot every time it landed on one of the stairs.

Gothi set her bowl aside for a moment and pulled Astrid by the hand, leading her to Hiccup. She pointed to the damp cloth on his forehead and the bucket of cold water on the floor with ice floating in it. Astrid got the idea. She sat in the chair beside his bed and dipped the cloth in the bucket, the water chilling her fingers. She wiped Hiccup's pale, clammy face and set the rag back on his forehead. Despite the cold water and the fact that his sheets were all pulled back, his skin was hot to the touch. And somehow he was shivering too.

"Oh, Hiccup," Astrid said, biting her lip. "Please be okay."

Gothi returned to Hiccup's bedside when she was finished making her medicine, and Astrid stepped back to give her space to work, but Gothi shook her head and beckoned her closer.

The old woman placed a piece of charcoal in Astrid's hand and pointed to a few spots on Hiccup's mid calf where the redness of his injury reached its limits. Astrid made black marks on his skin, but she didn't understand their purpose.

Gothi checked Hiccup's temperature with a hand on his forehead and shook her head. It was still high even though Astrid had been trying to cool him off. She plucked at Hiccup's shirt, gestured to Astrid, and then the bucket again.

"You want me to take his tunic off and put more cold water on him?" Astrid would've blushed if the circumstances weren't so dire.

Gothi nodded and Astrid busied herself with easing Hiccup out of his clothes carefully, so she wouldn't jostle him too much. He'd always been scrawny, but never fragile until that moment. It seemed like if she made just one wrong move, he would break.

Gothi started tending to Hiccup's leg and the young blonde glanced over at her.

Astrid didn't know much about healing. She was better at killing and injuring, but she thought she recognized an infection when she saw one. Hiccup's old bandages were beginning to seep some sort of discharge and when Gothi unwrapped them, Hiccup's wound underneath was blistered, red, and even completely charred in some places. She averted her eyes from that part quickly, but she couldn't quite get the image out of her head, especially when the air itself smelled like sickness.

She realized what the charcoal marks were for. They marked the progression of the infection, and if the redness went beyond those lines, they would know it was getting worse.

Astrid swallowed the lump in her throat and dipped the cloth in the water again. Her fingers were numb from doing it over and over, and yet it wasn't enough for Hiccup. He was still burning up, as if the fiery inferno that devoured his foot was somehow inside him, trying to finish the job by consuming the rest of his body.

"Don't worry, we'll take care of you," Astrid promised him, her thumb

stroking his pale, freckled cheek. She brushed the wet cloth over his arms and chest and torso, being mindful of his cuts and the places that were black and blue. As she did so, she couldn't help thinking that for a Hairy Hooligan especially, Hiccup wasn't very hairy at all. The only thing that gave him away as a fifteen year old was the fact that his voice had finally stopped cracking. He was just a boy, and he was too young to die. He couldn't die, not when he still had so much life left to live.

Fortunately, the water seemed to help a bit, since his breathing became more even and less shallow, but it wasn't much of an improvement.

Suddenly, there were several loud thumping noises from above. Astrid had no idea what was happening until Toothless' face appeared in the window.

"Oh, it's just you," she said, laughing. Even Gothi looked amused. Toothless gave his signature _toothless_ grin, even though he didn't know what was so funny.

She started talking to Hiccup again, even though she knew he probably couldn't hear her on whatever level of consciousness he was at. "Your dragon is prancing around on the roof again just so he can get a look at you. He's worried about you. We all are, so you'd better wake up soon."

Toothless purred his agreement.

"How was the fish?" Astrid asked him.

He licked his lips and bobbed his head.

"That's good."

The thought of food made Astrid's stomach growl and she was reminded that she ran out of the house without breakfast that morning, and it was lunch time already.

As if on cue, the front door downstairs opened and shut, and Gobber called upstairs, "Astrid, your mum sent you some soup. I was at your place to see if I could get some o' these last few ingredients from her garden and she said you didn't eat yet today."

Toothless chirped at her. She thought she knew what the dragon meant._ It's your turn. Go eat._

She looked to Gothi, who gave her a nod and allowed her to be dismissed.

"I'll be right down, Gobber!" Astrid called. She squeezed Hiccup's hand briefly before leaving him with Gothi and Toothless.

"I got everything Gothi asked for!" Gobber said proudly, holding up his basket of things. Astrid stepped forward and lifted the lid slightly, but he clapped his hook on top to keep it shut. She thought she'd seen something move in there. "Best keep that closed, lass," he advised.

"Did you see Stoick at all?" Astrid asked, changing the

subject.

"Aye yes, there seemed to be some kind o' trouble down at the docks. People were runnin' around with crossbows and were talkin' about launchin' the catapults. The chief's handlin' it now though," Gobber assured her before climbing the stairs to where Hiccup remained unmoving and unaware in his coma.

* * *

><p>AN: ** So this chapter is by far the longest. I'm finding it hard to predict chapter length now so the completion estimates on my profile may be way off, but that's okay, they're just estimates. I try to update every weekend but I'm going on vacation for a week (not this one but the next) so Chapter 7 might be delayed, but I'll try my best to avoid that or at least make up for it. Chapter 6 is already started, so who knows? I might get them both finished before I leave. But I'm also a procrastinator so... I might not.

Lastly, as of this chapter, I now meet beta reader qualifications. What do you guys think? Should I open myself up to beta requests? I've never been a beta reader.

7. Chapter 6

Chapter 6

* * *

><p>"NO! DON'T FIRE!" Stoick yelled, rushing down the winding platform jutting out from the cliff above the docks. Three ships were approaching the shores of Berk and by the looks of all the weaponry being directed at them, they weren't likely to get a friendly welcome.<p>

"But aren't those Outcast ships?" someone asked.

Stoick was quick to answer. "Well one o' them is definitely ours and the other two aren't tryin' to sink it. I'd say they used to be Outcast ships."

This made a lot of sense. The people lowered their weapons and Stoick finally allowed himself to exhale.

The ships drew closer until familiar faces could be made out on their decks. People started cheering and getting ready to help secure the boats.

Stoick spotted Spitelout among the crowds of disembarking people and asked, "What happened?"

"Some Outcasts thought they would take us down. We left them adrift on our other boat."

"Any deaths? Injuries?" Stoick always hated to ask those necessary questions. At least Spitelout hadn't let those Outcasts drown and guaranteed some sort of immediate retaliation from Alvin.

"No deaths, a few minor injuries. Except that Fishlegs boy. Got a bit

of a nasty bump on the head, that one. Now he keeps mutterin' numbers in his sleep. I've never been good with numbers."

"Can you wake him up?" Stoick asked, desperately hoping that Fishlegs hadn't slipped into a coma like his son.

"Yes, but he falls back asleep pretty quick. Rest is for the weak, I always s-"

Spitelout was silenced by Stoick's glare.

Hiccup was resting, and he needed lots of it. But there was no way anyone was calling this chief's son weak anymore. Not after he'd single-handedly saved them all.

Stoick didn't comment on it though. He just said, "You should've put up a flag o' surrender. A few people almost fired catapults and flamin' arrows at you, thinkin' you were Outcasts."

"Well, I'm not the chief. I tried my best to get everyone home in one piece, and I did," Spitelout said, which was as close to acknowledging his oversight as he was going to get.

"And I thank you for that," Stoick said slightly grudgingly. It could have been a lot worse after all.

"Plus, we've got two new ships, thanks to me," Spitelout added.

"Don't push your luck with me today, Spitelout."

Right. Spitelout knew when to quit. That was the difference between him and Alvin, and the reason why he was still on Berk and Alvin was not. He took the hint and went off to take stock of the cargo that the Outcast ships had been carrying.

Stoick's eye caught the twins, who were watching everyone from atop their Zippelback.

"Where's Fishlegs?" he asked them, not seeing the larger boy anywhere, or his Gronckle for that matter.

"We just brought him home," Ruffnut answered.

"Yeah, he was awake and everything by the time we got him there." Tuffnut added. He didn't seem too worried, but then he frowned. "How's Hiccup?"

Stoick ran a hand down his face. "Not well. He's got a fever."

It was obvious that the chief didn't feel like talking about it, so the twins didn't ask anything else.

"Is there anything you want us to do?" Ruffnut asked.

There was, actually. "Go find Snotlout and the three of you can give Grub and Bertha the Boiler a hand in the Great Hall. We've got a lot o' tired and hungry Hooligans to look after."

"Sure!" Tuffnut said, and he and his sister took off for the

Jorgenson house.

Stoick spent the next hour or so making sure his people were okay and pulling a crew together to start repairs on the ship he'd arrived on and the construction of new ones to replace the portion of their fleet that the Red Death torched.

"Yes, work on replacin' the smaller ones first so we'll have them for fishing and then the bigger ones for longer voyages and military-"

"CHIEF!" a voice yelled, interrupting Stoick's conversation with Salty the Shipwright.

Stoick whirled around to see Astrid, and his heart sunk. Her being here was not a good sign for Hiccup.

"Excuse me," he said quickly to Salty and then rushed towards the young blonde girl.

Her words came out in a jumbled mess.

"Hiccupsfevrwongodownanthinflectionisspreadinguphislegand-"

"Slow down, Astrid!" Stoick said, gripping her armoured shoulders.

She took a breath, desperately trying to calm down, but that was easier said than done.

She tried speaking again. "Gothi's tried everything but we can't bring Hiccup's fever down and the infection in his leg is spreading." Her breathing was sharp and ragged and Stoick realized she must've sprinted all the way down to the docks.

"Alright, let's go," he said, his expression hard, and they ran back up the cliff-side platforms that led to the village.

"Sorry lass, it's probably best if you wait out here for now," Gobber said as he ushered Stoick inside the house.

Astrid opened her mouth to argue but found she didn't have it in her for once. She just nodded and sat down on the front steps, looking very much like how she had found Stoick that morning.

She felt sick. And helpless. All afternoon, she'd done nothing but exactly what Gobber and Gothi had instructed her to do, but Hiccup had only continued to deteriorate. When Gobber finally sent her out to go find Stoick, Hiccup had been shivering violently and he was sweating from every pore in his body. Several times, his soiled bandages had been exchanged for fresh ones, and each time seemed to come sooner than the last.

His room even smelled stale and rotten, like death and disease, but Astrid must've stopped noticing it at some point because she only realized the stench was there after she got outside and breathed fresh air again. She hated the thought of Hiccup up there, in that tiny room full of sickness, fighting for his life. Hated the thought of him losing that fight, after all he'd done to survive up to that point.

It had taken all her strength to not yell something along the lines of "Hiccup, you can't give up! You can't die on us, not now. Not ever. You have to fight!" Because Gobber was right, and she couldn't talk to Hiccup like he was dying.

She couldn't make her usual threats at him either because in a way, he had every right to let himself die if he wanted. He'd saved them all, and he owed them absolutely nothing. Making demands that he live wasn't fair, because that was like asking him to climb a mountain when he might never reach the summit. He would do it only if he had the will and the ability. She had to trust that he had the will and she could only hope he had the strength for it.

But that afternoon weighed on her, and she found it hard to hope. Hiccup hadn't given her any sign at all, any reason to believe that he would ever stabilize and eventually wake up. Gobber and Gothi's faces had been similarly grim, which only confirmed her suspicions that Hiccup's chances of surviving at that point were slim.

Astrid was suddenly struck by the memory of flying with him. It was the first and only time she remembered him being happy in his very being. It wasn't like the mild amusement that sometimes showed just on the surface. His smile had been genuine that day, and it was infectious. She liked seeing a smile on him that wasn't just the half-hearted grin of someone who would always feel like a misfit. She remembered touching fluffy pink clouds, wrapping her arms around him and resting her head on his shoulder and smiling with him because in that moment, she was happy too. Up in the sky, there was no pressure, no expectations to live up to, only freedom.

Hiccup had shown her that. Given her that. He'd changed everything, really, for everyone. He deserved to live a long and happy life.

Astrid found herself fighting to hold back tears at the thought that he wouldn't get to have any of that. He might never fly again, might never see Toothless, or his friends and family, or ever get married or become chief or see this new Berk that was already coming into being because of him.

The dam behind her eyes broke when the words, I should've kissed him on his stupid lips, crossed her mind. She was kidding herself if she thought she could keep pretending that she didn't have feelings for the dork. They weren't exactly new feelings; they'd just been highly suppressed until very recently, because Hiccup had been a very inconvenient boy to have a crush on, and she didn't need that kind of thing complicating her life. But now it seemed like she didn't have much choice in the matter anymore â€“ he was undeniably a part of her life, whether she liked it or not.

Astrid gasped when something nudged her arm. She picked her head up from her hands.

"Toothless?"

She wiped her wet cheeks and the dragon gave her a sad look with wide eyes. He'd come down from the roof because he'd heard her crying.

"I'm okay," she said quietly, sniffling. She scratched Toothless

lightly under his chin and behind his ears. Then she hugged the beast tightly. "Thank you for saving him." Astrid was grateful.

Toothless purred and nuzzled her, and his presence helped her feel better. Gradually, she managed to calm down.

Just then, there was a creak and the door behind Astrid opened. She turned to see Gobber framed by the entrance.

"Lass? We're going to need your help now, if you don't mind," he said.

"Anything," Astrid said, meaning it. She stood and followed the blacksmith inside, with Toothless right behind her. She would do anything if it would put a stop to Hiccup's illness and give him a chance to come out of his coma.

* * *

><p>AN:** This chapter is super late. Oops! :(To make up for it, **Chapter 7 will be posted tomorrow**! :D Probably around the same time as today. I just have to finish editing it and have my sister proofread it. She just got her wisdom teeth out a couple days ago so I've been trying not to shove my writing in her face too much. I remember how annoying it is to have a sore jaw and not be able to eat anything but mushy food! She's a trooper though.

Reviews are like s'mores. You always want some more! ;D Seriously though, I really appreciate them, so thank you to everyone who's written one. You guys make my day. :)

8. Chapter 7

WARNING: Some readers may find parts of this chapter disturbing or unsettling. I tried my best to find a balance between the emotions I wanted to elicit and describing what was happening without being too graphic. I think I succeeded, and I don't think I'm pushing my T rating by any means, but the feedback I get from this will be the true judge of that. I'm hoping this warning is unnecessary, but better safe than sorry.

* * *

><p>Chapter 7<p>

* * *

><p>She was surprised to see that Stoick and Gobber had moved Hiccup and his bed down to the first floor, but it made sense to do so, since that was where the water and the icebox were. And it would keep Toothless off the roof.<p>

"What's going on?" she asked.

"The infection is only going to get worse if we don't stop it, and there's only one way to do that now," Stoick said grimly.

"And what's that?"

"Let's just say his peg leg is going to have to be a little bit taller," Gobber said.

Astrid paled. "You're going to cut more of his leg off?"

She noticed that Gobber had a rather large blade attachment on his arm, which pretty much answered her question. The sharp, glistening edge of it was like a threat, and Astrid suddenly felt like icy water was trickling down her spine.

"He's either going to lose some more of his leg or his life," Gobber stated bluntly.

Well there was no arguing with that.

"What do you need me to do?" Astrid asked, finally prying her eyes away from the cleaver.

"Hold him down. He won't wake up but he might put up a fight," Stoick said, his jaw tight. "Careful though, we're pretty sure he's got a couple cracked ribs."

"Oh, for the love of Thor," she said, feeling dizzy.

"Can you do that? I've got to go find someone who will be able to stich him shut afterwards."

Astrid briefly wondered why she wasn't the one being sent to go get the village seamstress, who was no stranger to stitching up people instead of fabric, but then she saw the reason in Stoick's eyes. He wouldn't be able to watch what was about to happen without losing it. He couldn't be in the room.

"I can do it," Astrid said, determined to do whatever was necessary to save Hiccup's life.

Stoick nodded gratefully at her and left. Gobber started explaining what was going to happen in more detail.

"We're goin' to tie off his leg so he don't bleed too much, take off the bad part and file the bone smooth, and most importantly, we've got to get him stitched up as quickly as possible. If we can't then we'll have to umâ€œ!" Gobber gestured to the iron rods that were sticking in the coals of the fireplace. Astrid's stomach lurched. They would have to cauterize the wound if they couldn't stop the bleeding, and that meant sticking a red-hot piece of metal to his flesh and searing it to cut off the blood flow. And that was bad, because it would mean more scarring and scars were not helpful when it came to walking with a peg leg.

"Okay," Astrid said, swallowing.

"Gothi and I are goin' to take a good look now and figure out how much he's got to lose. He shouldn't move or anythin' right now, but just in caseâ€œ!" Gobber gestured to Hiccup's bare chest.

She took off her boots, climbed up, and straddled Hiccup but didn't sit on him for fear of hurting his ribs. She figured his injured ones were under the bruise that covered a good chunk of his lower right side. She bent forward and placed her hands on his freckled

shoulders, ready to push him down if he moved.

Hiccup didn't move, and Gobber and Gothi didn't say much while they examined him more closely; just a few muttered words from Gobber and the odd rustle from Gothi as she communicated without speaking. At least until Gobber exclaimed, "By Thor, are thoseâ€¢?"

"What?" Astrid asked, not taking her eyes off of Hiccup.

"Teeth marks. In the bone."

"What?" Astrid said again. The only way he could've gotten teeth marks was fromâ€¢ "Toothless?"

The dragon whined and lowered his head under Astrid's wide-eyed stare.

They were all silent for a moment. Then Gobber cleared his throat. "I thought he got hit by some flamin' part of the dragon he blew up, because his stump is all burnt, but nowâ€¢ It looks like that one accidentally bit too hard when he was tryin' to catch him." Gobber pointed a thumb at Toothless.

"Well then how did he get burned?" Astrid asked.

Gothi seemed to know that one. She stuck the end of her sceptre into the ashes in the fire and drew a pale gray, powdery image on the wood floor.

Gobber translated. "She says dragons stop themselves from bleedin' with fire. Toothless probably tasted the blood and gave Hiccup a little fire blast to stop it."

Much like the irons in the coals would if stitches weren't going to be enough for Hiccup.

"Is that what happened?" Astrid asked Toothless.

He made an affirmative sound and lowered his head again.

"You saved him. That's all that matters. Don't feel bad," Astrid said. The words were hard to get out because Hiccup might still die because of his injury, but he'd be dead already if it weren't for Toothless protecting him in his fireproof wings.

"We best not tell him unless he asks after he wakes up," Gobber said. Astrid nodded and Gothi put her hands up in an I-won't-talk-anyway sort of gesture.

Erma Ingeman, as in Fishlegs' mother, walked in. She was an average-sized woman, but you would never guess that she and Fishlegs were related just by looking at her. They had the same eyes and temperament, but that was it. At any rate, she was the best person for the job of stitching Hiccup back together after they amputated his leg further.

"Stoick is staying outside to make sure nobody else comes in," Erma said. No one argued with her.

While Gothi was a healer who knew all about medicine, Erma was one

who knew about surgery â€“ a consequence of knowing how to stitch people up â€“ and she was the best in the entire Archipelago. It made Astrid feel a little better to see her there.

Erma took charge immediately and wiped Gobber's blade with something from a bowl that Gothi held. It smelled like it contained alcohol. Then Gothi pointed to the place on Hiccup's leg where the blade needed to come down and Erma voiced her agreement. Then she tied a leather belt tight around Hiccup's upper calf and leaned on his knees to help Astrid hold him down.

"Okay, are we ready?" she asked.

They were.

"Threeâ€| twoâ€| oneâ€| "

Astrid squeezed her eyes shut when the blade came down for its first strike against Hiccup's flesh and bone, even though she had her back to Gobber. In that same instant, a raw, feral scream tore itself from Hiccup's lungs and he jerked hard underneath her, but Astrid wasn't about to let him go anywhere. She pressed his shoulders down into his mattress and choked back a sob of her own for his pain. Nobody had warned her that he might scream in his sleep.

Toothless was at the boy's side in an instant, pressing his nose to Hiccup's cheek gently. I'm here.

"It'll be over soon, Hiccup, I promise." Astrid told him as tears rolled down both of their cheeks. "It's going to be okay, just hang on!"

One of his hands found her forearm, and then the other did too. When the next hit came, he weakly tried to get her hands off of him as his spine arched and he unleashed another wild wail, long and loud enough to make his throat ragged.

"No, you need to stay still or you'll hurt yourself more," Astrid told him. She forced his arms back down and held them under her knees. Then she planted her palms on Hiccup's chest to hold him where he was. Heat from his skin continued to spread into Astrid's hands.

He shrieked and struggled with every hack that Gobber took at his bone, and when he wasn't doing that he continued to shake because of his fever.

"How much more, Gobber?" Astrid asked.

"It's off. Halfway done," he said.

Hiccup was getting tired. He fought less even though Gobber was still hurting him. Astrid slid her knees down from his upper arms and his hands found her wrists, but this time his grip didn't try to push her away, it held on like she was his anchor to the world.

Finally, after Astrid was starting to worry that Hiccup was beginning to pale too much from the blood loss, Erma changed places with Gobber and started stitching him closed. She had to use the irons a couple of times to stop the flow from the larger blood vessels, and Hiccup

let out tiny, broken noises when she did. Thankfully, everything else was closed up with a needle and thread.

When she was finished, she stood and said, "Best amputation I've ever done. All that's left to do is wait."

She wiped her forehead with the back of her arm, and her palm was red with blood. Astrid felt lightheaded.

Hiccup had stopped moving, and his laboured breathing was beginning to slow. Toothless licked his face.

"You did it," Astrid told him. "It's all over. You can get better now."

She exhaled with relief and gingerly got off of his bed. She yelled for Stoick to come in and he did so immediately while Erma and Gobber washed the blood off of themselves and Gothi wrapped Hiccup's newly shortened " again " leg in fresh bandages. Astrid felt dizzy and drained, but Toothless kept her upright while she slowed her heartbeat.

Gobber ruffled Hiccup's hair. "You're a brave lad. We're proud o' you." He turned to Astrid. "You too, lass."

Erma hugged Astrid. "You did so well."

Stoick looked at her very seriously once he'd satisfied himself that Hiccup was all right for the moment. "I hope you never have to go through somethin' like that again," he said.

He knew what it was like, not just from hearing his son screech through the walls. He'd been there when Gobber lost his leg, and he'd been the one to hold his best friend down while he got stitched up way back then. It hadn't been easy.

"Me either," Astrid said.

"He won't remember any of it," Erma said.

"Thank Odin for that," Gobber said. The memories of his own experience were bad enough, and they were still foggy in his mind.

"Thank you, all of you," Stoick said sincerely.

"Don't mention it," Erma said. "Just keep an eye on him and try to keep him comfortable. The fever should go down soon."

"Got it," Stoick said as Gobber clapped him on the shoulder.

The others left, except for Astrid, and of course Toothless.

"Are you alright? I know what you did wasn't easy," Stoick said to her.

She exhaled. "I'm fine, I justâ€| Can I stay with him for a bit?"

"Of course. You're welcome here any time you like," Stoick told

her.

"Thank you, sir."

He left to give her some privacy. Plus, as much as he wanted nothing more than to stay at home and be with his son, Stoick still had a lot of responsibilities to take care of before the day was over.

Toothless stayed though. He watched Astrid gently take Hiccup's hand in hers. It wasn't how she normally interacted with people. Even when she'd kissed Hiccup's cheek back in the cove, her fisted hand had gripped the front of his shirt and hauled him close enough to press her lips to his cheek.

He seemed a bit better already. The shaking had stopped, although he was still feverish, but it seemed like the worst of it was over.

It felt weird talking to him, because she didn't know if he could hear her at all, on some sort of unconscious level. She doubted it, but just in caseâ€!

"You don't have to fight against that infection anymore, Hiccup. It's gone." Along with another six inches of your shin. "Get well, and wake up as soon as you can. We've all been worried about you, especially Toothless, and your dad." And me.

Astrid was quiet for a moment and just sat there, holding Hiccup's hand and watching his chest rise and fall with each shallow breath he took. She reassured herself that he was still alive, and told herself that his chances were good now. Then she decided she wasn't above trying to bribe him.

"Tell you what, Hiccup," Astrid started. "I will kiss you on that sarcastic, smart mouth of yours when you wake up from this. It'll be the first thing I do, I swear. Well, after I punch you for scaring me."

She was kidding herself though, and she knew it. She wouldn't be trying to motivate him like that if she didn't already want to kiss him. Especially considering how she wasn't even sure if he liked her that way, because although rumour had it that he did, he never let any hints about his actual feelings slip, at least not in front of her. And rumours were often false.

Astrid smiled weakly. "I'd tell you not to go do something like that again but knowing you, the odds of that are slim. Still, try not to get yourself killed."

Toothless chirped his agreement and Astrid scratched him behind the ears.

She continued talking to Hiccup about anything and everything. She told him about what he'd missed out on so far, being in a coma, and she told him stories and tales of old, almost all of which he'd probably heard before. Eventually, her eyelids became heavy and she fell asleep in her chair with her head resting on the edge of Hiccup's bed, beside his arm.

When Stoick returned late that evening, he found Toothless watching

over the sleeping teens intently, their fingers still entwined.

* * *

><p>AN:** First, thank you for the reviews! Second, this chapter is late because I was waiting to have it read by someone, but that never happened and when it got to be an hour past when I said I would post this, I decided to update anyway even though I haven't had the chance to get any feedback first. I then spent an hour and a half making some final tweaks and now, here it is. So... reader opinions for this chapter are very important to me and I would really love to know how I did on this one. Gah, I'm so nervous! Did I get it right? Please tell me.

Also, I have new cover art for this fic! You guys like? It doesn't really have anything to do with the story content, but I drew it and I'm proud of it and it's Toothless and Toothless is adorable.

:D

9. Chapter 8

Chapter 8

* * *

><p>Knock. Knock. Knock.

"Snotlout!" Tuffnut yelled while Ruffnut started to pound on the door more insistently.

Bang. Bang. Bang.

And then faster.

Bangbangbangbangbangbangbang.

"Snotlout!" the twins heard Mrs. Jorgenson shout from inside. "Go get the door!" They snickered.

"I'm going, Mom!"

Snotlout's footsteps got louder just before he answered the door and looked at each of the Thorstons standing on his front porch. "Did you have to make so much noise?"

"Yes, it was absolutely necessary," Tuffnut said seriously. Ruffnut kept a straight face as she nodded in agreement with her brother. Snotlout just rolled his eyes.

"The chief wants us to go help out in the Great Hall," Ruffnut explained.

"Alright, let's go."

* * *

><p>When they got to the Great Hall, Bertha put the twins to work serving up stew for everyone because she didn't trust them around sharp objects or flames. Snotlout got stuck in the kitchen chopping

vegetables beside a massive Grub, who was hacking away at raw chickens.<p>

"Why do they get the easier job?" Snotlout complained, taking out his frustration by bringing the knife in his hand down against the cutting board. It made a satisfying sound but didn't make Snotlout feel any better.

"Choppin' not very hard," Grub said simply as he wiped his hands on his white apron, adding to the pale blood smears that were already there.

"Good thing, or you might not be able to do it," Snotlout muttered under his breath.

"What?" Grub asked, picking up his knife again.

Snotlout hadn't expected the bald butcher to hear him. "It's not that," he said, choosing not to repeat his insult. "It's just so hot back here. And humid. Feels like Odin is trying to steam us alive."

"Bertha always say if you can't take kitchen get out of heat." Grub's brow wrinkled. "Or somethin' like that."

Snotlout groaned. "But I'll look stupid if I do that. The twins will never let me live it down."

Grub shrugged. "Heat not bother me."

Clearly. Somehow, the man wasn't even breaking a sweat. Years of experience must've made him used to the uncomfortable environment.

Snotlout just went back to slicing without saying anything else. He might've been stupid, even by Viking standards, but Grub had a gentleness and innocence about him that made it difficult to make fun of him or get mad at him. Snotlout didn't like the effect. He didn't want his feelings to be diffused. He wanted to be angry, even if it was at something stupid like an uncomfortable kitchen because if he couldn't be angry, then he would beâ€¦ upset.

Snotlout sniffled and squeezed his eyes shut.

Grub was more perceptive than most people gave him credit for. The man glanced at Snotlout but didn't say anything until the teen sniffled again.

"You cry 'cause of your friend? Hiccup?"

Snotlout jumped and glared at Grub. "What? No. He's not my friend, just my cousin. And I'm not crying."

"Then why eyes wet? Grub asked.

"It's the onions!" Snotlout nearly yelled while he furiously wiped his cheeks.

"Potatoes," Grub corrected quietly, since those were in fact what Snotlout was cutting.

"Whatever!" Snotlout gritted his teeth.

He knew what was happening to Hiccup. Mrs. Ingeman had been in the Great Hall when Stoick had come to get her and when he did, the twins happened to overhear their brief conversation. They relayed it back to Snotlout with worried faces. Hiccup was sick. He could still die.

The news made Snotlout feel ill, and cooking was only a small distraction.

"Don't worry. He be okay," Grub said reassuringly. Snotlout envied how certain he sounded.

Snotlout glared at the potatoes in front of him. "I don't care about him, I just don't want to have to be chief. It's a lot of work, and I'm next in line after him."

Even though Snotlout thought he was better than anyone else at just about everything, it was true that he didn't think he was cut out to be a chief. He never thought that Hiccup was either until he led them to victory over the Red Death. That sure changed his mind. But even before that, Snotlout would always get very quiet and make noncommittal sounds whenever his father would make some sort of comment about how surely the village wouldn't stand for it if Stoick named Hiccup the Useless as his successor. Snotlout was obviously the only acceptable choice.

He never wanted to be chief. Not even when he was little, because Hiccup frequently expressed how much he didn't want to lead the village when he grew up and the boy was never short on reasons why. Snotlout realized he wasn't exaggerating anything the first time he saw Stoick with a "two-block" headache.

But it wasn't really about who would be chief. Snotlout cared about Hiccup, and in some ways, he always had. He just had a funny way of showing it. They'd actually spent much of their early lives together, because Snotlout's mother had nursed Hiccup after Valka disappeared, and even though Hiccup was the older of the two, Snotlout was bigger, so he treated Hiccup like a little brother. The only reason he ever picked on him was to toughen him up, because they were Vikings and Vikings needed to be tough. It wasn't his fault that Hiccup never learned and never did anything right.

The habit stuck, and led to the mutual dislike they had for one another. But that never meant they didn't care.

Grub could see it. "People no cry 'less they care."

Snotlout groaned. "So what if I do? It doesn't make a difference. He still might—" Snotlout cut himself off abruptly. "He mightâ€¦ not make it."

Grub gave him a very serious look and then repeated, "He be okay," while he nodded.

Snotlout sighed. "I sure hope you're right."

* * *

><p>Gobber needed to distract himself for a while. After several years of being Hiccup's mentor and having no children of his own, Hiccup felt like a son to Gobber, and cutting off his leg hadn't been easy. He'd watched the boy grow up and hone his skills in the forge. He'd even become a help to the blacksmith, rather than a nuisance, and Gobber had to appreciate the ideas Hiccup came up with. Most of them were awful and frequently backfired, sure, but that never stopped Hiccup. He'd tinker with them until he got them to work, and that was why Gobber could now roll sheet metal out in a fraction of the time it used to take to hammer it somewhat flat.</p>

Now, he headed for the pile of scrap metal in the back of his shop. He thought there was a nice big chunk of iron back there that would make a nice sword.

But when he squeezed through the little alcove between the main part of the shop and the back storeroom, his helmet smacked one of the overhead beams. When he threw his hand and hook up to catch his helmet, he hit the beam again. There was a crash from upstairs.

Gobber looked up and saw the dim light slipping through the cracks in the floorboards above and catching the dust motes in the air.

"Better go see what that was," he muttered aloud to himself. He backed out of the alcove and hobbled up the rickety stairs. No one but Hiccup ever went up there, because pretty much any averaged-sized Viking would likely end up falling through the floor. Gobber stepped carefully, retracting his peg leg once when the board beneath it made a suspicious creaking sound. He sidestepped around the spot instead.

He remembered to duck and turn sideways going through the doorway to Hiccup's drawing room. As soon as he did, the source of the noise was obvious. On the far side of the room, a lump of twisted wire and leather laid on the floor. There was a peg in the wall above it where Hiccup had hung it. Gobber picked it up and unfolded it, bending the wire back into its original shape.

It looked like the tail fin that Hiccup's Night Fury had been sporting before it got incinerated and mangled, but Gobber's trained eye could see the craftsmanship flaws in it. The wire wasn't rigid enough to stretch the leather tight over the frame and the edges weren't properly smoothed. Sharp corners like that would quickly wear holes right through the leather wherever it touched.

But then he turned around and saw the wall behind him covered in schematic drawings of wing and tail fin shapes and intricate little mechanisms involving gears and pulleys. And on the desk, there were charcoal plans for a saddle complete with a harness and tether.

He smiled, realizing that what he held in his hands was just a simple, hastily made prototype. Hiccup needed to test his idea before he wasted any effort making something that might not work. And it must've worked well enough before whatever crash landing it was that made it into a crumpled mess, because Hiccup's other drawings used the same basic design.

Gobber was the best in the business when it came to quality work, but he knew he could never design something from scratch like that. That talent belonged to Hiccup alone. But the plans were all there. Gobber could read plans. And Hiccup would need to heal up a lot more before anyone even thought about fitting him for a prosthetic, so why not get started on the one his dragon would need in the meantime?

He hung the prototype back on its peg and inspected Hiccup's tail fin plans. What was left of the ruined fin never made it back from the Dragon's Nest, but Toothless' saddle was over at the Chief's house. Gobber could have a go at fixing it and rebuilding the fin. He sorted through page after page of calculations and measurements and images. Hiccup kept such meticulous notes that building the fin would be no challenge at all.

Gobber grinned, knowing exactly what he would be working on for the next few days, as soon as he gathered all the things he would need andâ€"

Something caught his eye, peaking out of the corner of Hiccup's sketchbook.

Gobber lifted the cover and his eyes widened at the sketch there. Then he chuckled.

"Hope you know what you're gettin' yourself into with that one, lad," he said out loud.

Because there was a slightly smudged image of Astrid's face, looking every bit herself but also exceptionally beautiful, strong, fearless, determined and kind. Most people noticed the first one or two of those things about her, and people that knew Astrid sometimes saw the others, but Hiccup was the only one who could see them all at once, and somehow he'd been able to capture all of those aspects of her in a single image.

Gobber laughed even louder when he saw the drawing on the opposite page, still firmly attached to the book's binding. He saw Astrid swinging an axe down like the warrior she was and with a battle cry in her throat that Gobber could almost hear.

"Guess you do know," he said, quite amused by the fact. Then he closed the book before he saw any pictures that were missing something importantâ€œ like clothes. He wasn't sure Hiccup was the type to do that, especially considering the obvious respect he had for Astrid, but he was still a teenage boy. Best not to take any chances.

Turning his attention back to the wall, Gobber started to see that not all the drawings there were designs once he started collecting them into a pile to use as reference. The drawings were tacked up in layers, and underneath the flight plans were countless studies of a certain Night Fury, drawn with as much care as Astrid's sketches.

They were amazing. Gobber had never seen a dragon this way. He saw Toothless eating, running, jumping, fishing, rolling around, flying â€œ with a much less-detailed rider on his back â€œ and he could feel the dragon's emotions in every image, especially in his intelligent eyes. There was curiosity, playfulness, pride, amusement, fierceness,

surpriseâ€| everything. And â€" by the gods, was the creature _smiling?_ Yes, he was.

Gobber sighed, wishing that everyone could've seen what Hiccup saw so much sooner. Then, maybe things would've been different. But the past is the past. It can't be changed.

Gobber touched the corner of one of Hiccup's earliest drawings of Toothless. They were noticeable because the perspective was further away, not close up like the later ones. "Things will be different now," Gobber promised Toothless' image.

Under the tips of Gobber's fingers, the dragon's body hung like a bat with his tail curved over the branch of a tree as he slept soundly, immortalized forever on that page by Hiccup's hand.

* * *

><p>AN:** First off, thank you for the reviews! Seriously, they make my day. You guys are great. Stay awesome.

Now, this chapter was beyond late, I know. But now that I'm back at university, I can't make any promises about when updates will come. What I can promise is that I'll post chapters the weekend after I finish them and I WILL FINISH THIS STORY. Eventually. I've come too far not to, so rest assured, no matter how long I make you wait, the ending will come. (I also have the perfect opening line for a sequel set during HTTYD 2 that I simply must use.) I'd estimate this story is about half finished right now but like I've said before, I've got no outline, so I could be way off. It could be more, could be less. We'll have to wait and see!

As a side note, I'm also playing around with an idea that someone on tumblr had and I've got some stuff written, so there may be an HTTYD one-shot or short story in the near future. I'm keeping the details a surprise though. My url is marlisant if anyone wants to dig for clues. ;) My blog isn't that great though.

Lastly, a quick reminder that the latest update progress information for this story is always available on my profile.

End
file.